

JOB'S REGRET AND OUR OWN

NO. 1011

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*"Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness. As I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle."
Job 29:2, 3, 4.*

IF Job here refers to the *temporal* prosperity which he had lost, we cannot condemn him for his complaint, neither can we commend him. It is but the expression of a natural regret, which would be felt by any man who had experienced such great reverses. But there is everywhere in the expressions which he uses such a strain of spirituality, that we are inclined to believe that he had more reference to the condition of his *heart* than to the state of his *property*. His soul was depressed; he had lost the light of God's countenance; his inward comforts were declining, his joy in the Lord was at low ebb, this he regretted far more than anything else. No doubt he deplored the departure of those prosperous days when, as he states it, his root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon his branch; but, much more did he bemoan that the lamp of the Lord no more shone upon his head, and the secret of God was not upon his tabernacle. As his spiritual regrets are far more instructive to us than his natural ones, we will turn all our attention to them. We may, without violence, appropriate Job's words to ourselves; for I fear that many of us can with great propriety take up our wailing and mourn for the days of our espousals, the happy days of our first love. I shall have to trouble you with many divisions this morning; but I shall be brief upon each one, and I hope that our thoughts may be led onward, and rendered practically serviceable to us, by the blessing of God's Spirit.

I. Let us begin by saying that regrets such as those expressed in the text are and ought to be very BITTER. If it is the loss of *spiritual* things that we regret, then may we say from the bottom of our hearts, "Oh that I were as in months past."

It is a great thing for a man to be near to God; it is a very choice privilege to be admitted into the inner circle of communion, and to become God's familiar friend. But great as the privilege is, so great is the loss of it; no darkness is as dark as that which falls on eyes accustomed to the light. The poor man who was always poor is scarcely poor, but he who has fallen from the summit of greatness into the depths of poverty is poor, indeed! The man who has never enjoyed communion with God knows nothing of what it must be to lose it; but he who has once been pressed upon the Savior's bosom will mourn as long as he lives, if he is deprived of the sacred enjoyment.

The mercies which Job deplored in our text are no little ones. First, he complains that he had lost the consciousness of divine *preservation*. He says, "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me." There are days with Christians when they can see God's hand all around them, checking them in the first approaches of sin, and setting a hedge about all their ways; their conscience is tender, and the Spirit of God is obeyed by them; they are, therefore, kept in all their ways; the angels of God watching over them, lest they dash their foot against a stone. But when they fall into laxity of spirit, and walk at a distance from God, they are not so preserved; though kept from final and total apostasy, yet they are not kept from very grievous sin, and like Peter who followed afar off, they may be left to deny their Master, even with oaths and curses. If we have lost that conscious preservation of God which once covered us from every fiery dart; if we no longer abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and feel no longer that His truth is our shield and buckler, we have lost a joy worth worlds, and we may well deplore it with anguish of heart!

Job had also lost divine *consolation*, for he looks back with lamentation to the time when God's candle shone upon his head, when the sun of God's love was, as it were, in its zenith and cast no shadow; when he rejoiced without ceasing, and triumphed from morning to night in the God of his salvation. The joy of the Lord is our strength; the joy of the Lord is Israel's excellence; it is the heaven of heaven; it is heaven even upon earth, and consequently, to lose it is a terrible calamity. Once a person has been satisfied with favor, and is full of the blessing of the Lord, will he be content to go into the dry and thirsty land, and live far off from God? Will he not rather cry out with David, "My soul thirsts for God! When shall I come and appear before God?" Surely his agonizing prayer will be, "Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your free spirit." Love to God will never be content if His face is hidden; until the curtain is drawn aside, and the King's face is seen through the lattices, the true spouse will spend her life in sighing: mourning like a dove bereaved of its mate.

Moreover, Job deplored the loss of divine *illumination*. "By His light," he says, "I walked through darkness." That is to say, perplexity ceased to be perplexity! God shed such a light upon the mysteries of providence that where others missed their path, Job, made wise by heaven, could find it. There have been times when, to our patient faith, all things have been plain. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine," but if we walk far off from God, then, straightway, even the precious truth of God is no clearer to us, and the dealings of God with us in providence appear to be like a maze. He is wise as Solomon who walks with God; but he is a very fool who trusts his own understanding. All the wit that we have gathered by observation and experience will not supply us with sufficiency of common sense if we turn away from God! Israel, without consulting God, made a league with her enemies; she thought the case most plain when she entered into hasty alliance with the Gibeonites, but she was duped by cunning because she asked not counsel of the Lord. In the simplest business we shall err if we seek not direction from the Lord; yet where matters are most complicated, we shall walk wisely if we wait for a voice from the oracle, and seek the good Shepherd's guidance. We may bitterly lament, therefore, if we have lost the Holy Spirit's light. If now the Lord answers us not, neither by His Word, nor by His providence; if we wander alone, crying, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him," we are in an evil case, and may well sigh for the days when by His light, we walked through darkness.

Moreover, Job had lost divine *communion*; so it seems, for he mourned the days of his youth; when the secret of God was upon his tabernacle. Who shall tell to another what the secret of God is? Believing hearts know it, but they cannot pronounce aright the words that could explain it, nor can they convey by language what the secret is. The Lord manifests Himself unto His people as He does not unto the world; we could not tell the love passages that there are between believers and their Lord; even when they are set to such sweet music as the Song of Solomon, carnal minds cannot discern their delights; they cannot plow with our heifer, and therefore they read not our riddle! As Paul in heaven saw things which it were unlawful for a man to utter, so the believer sees and enjoys, in communion with Christ, what it would not only be unlawful, but impossible for him to tell to carnal men! Such pearls are not for swine; the spiritual discerns all things, but he himself is discerned of no man. It is a high privilege, beyond all privileges to enter into familiar communion with the Most High, and the man who has once possessed it, and has lost it, has a more bitter cause for regret than if, being rich, he had lost his wealth; or being famous, he had lost esteem; or being in health, he were suddenly brought to the bed of languishing. No loss can equal the loss of You, my God! No eclipse is as black as the hiding of Your face! No storm is as fierce as the letting forth of Your indignation! It is grief upon grief to find that You are not with me as in the days of old! Wherever, then, these regrets do exist, if the men's hearts are as they should be, they are not mere hypocritical or superficial expressions, but they express the most bitter experiences of our human existence; "Oh that I were as in months past" is no sentimental sigh, but the voice of the innermost spirit in anguish, as one who has lost his first-born.

II. But, secondly, let me remind you that these regrets are NOT INEVITABLE. That is to say, it is not absolutely necessary that a Christian should ever feel them, or be compelled to express them. It has grown to be a tradition among us that every Christian must backslide in a measure, and that growth in grace cannot be unbrokenly sustained; it is regarded by many as a law of nature that our first love must grow cold, and our early zeal must necessarily decline. I do not believe it for a moment! "The path of the just is as the shining light which shines more and more unto the perfect day." And were we watchful and

careful to live near to God, there is no reason why our spiritual life should not continuously make progress both in strength and beauty! There is no inherent necessity in the divine life, itself, compelling it to decline, for is it not written, "It shall be in him a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life"? "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Grace is a living and incorruptible seed that lives and abides forever and there is nowhere impressed upon the divine life a law of pining and decay! If we do falter and faint in the onward path, it is our sin, and it is doubly sinful to forge excuses for it; it is not to be laid upon the back of some mysterious necessity of the new nature that it should be so, but it is to be brought as a charge against ourselves! Nor do outward circumstances ever furnish a justification to us if we decline in grace, for under the worst conditions, believers have grown in grace. Deprived of the joys of Christian fellowship, and denied the comforts of the means of grace, believers have, nevertheless, been known to attain to a high-degree of likeness to Christ Jesus! Thrown into the midst of wicked companions, and forced to hear, like righteous Lot, the filthy conversation of the ungodly, yet Christians have shone all the brighter for the surrounding darkness, and have been able to escape from a wicked and perverse generation. Certain is it that a man may be an eminent Christian, and be among the poorest of the poor; poverty need not, therefore, make us depart from God! And it is equally certain that a man may be rich, and for all that may walk with God, and be distinguished for great grace! There is absolutely no lawful position of which we may say, "It compels a man to decline in grace."

And, brothers and sisters, there is no period of our life in which it is necessary for us to go back. The young Christian, with all the strength of his natural passions, can, by grace, be strong and overcome the wicked one. The Christian in middle life, surrounded with the world's cares, can prove that "this is the victory which overcomes the world, even our faith." The man immersed in business may still be baptized of the Holy Spirit; assuredly, old age offers no excuse for decline—"they shall still bring forth fruit in old age. They shall be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright." No, beloved, as Christ said to His disciples when they would gladly have sent the multitude away to buy meat, "They need not depart," so would He say to the whole company of the Lord's people, "You need not depart." There is no compulsion for decline in grace! Your sun need not stand still, your moon need not wane; if you cannot *add* a cubit to your spiritual stature, at any rate, it need not *decrease*! There are no reasons written in the book of your spiritual nature why you, as a believer, should lose fellowship with God. And if you do so, take blame and shame to yourself, but do not ascribe it to necessity; do not gratify your corruptions by supposing that they are licensed to occasionally prevail; neither vex your graces by conceiving that they are doomed to inevitable defeat at a certain season! The spirit that is in us lusts to evil, but the Holy Spirit is able to subdue it, and will subdue it if we yield ourselves to Him.

III. But, now, I am compelled to say that the regrets expressed in our text are exceedingly COMMON, and it is only here and there that we meet with a believer who has not had cause to use them. It ought not to be so, but it is. How grievously often will the pastor hear this among the bleating of the sheep—"Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me."—

*"What peaceful hours I then enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still.
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill."*

The commonness of this lamentation may be somewhat accounted for by the universal tendency to undervalue the present, and exaggerate the excellence of the past. Have you ever noticed this in natural things? We are prone to cast a partial eye upon some imaginary "good old times." It is gone, and therefore it was good; it is here, and therefore it is dubious! In the middle of the summer we feel that the heat is so taxing that a frost would be the most delightful thing conceivable; we love, we say, the bracing air of winter; we are sure it is much healthier for us—yet, usually, when winter arrives, and the extreme cold sets in, we are all most anxious for the advent of spring, and we feel that somehow or other the frost is more trying to us than the heat! I personally met with an illustration of this tendency the other day. I went down a steep cliff to the sea shore, and during the descent every step tried my weak knees, and I felt that going down hill was the most difficult traveling in the world! Soon I had to return from the sands and climb the steep path again, and when I began to pant and puff with the difficult ascent, I changed my opinion, and felt that I would a great deal sooner go down than come up! The fact is that

whatever is with us we think to be the worse, and whatever *was* with us we conceive to be the better! We may, therefore, take some discount from our regrets. Perhaps were we more conscious of the benefit of the present state, and we made less prominent the difficulty of it, we would not sigh to be as we were in months past.

Then again, regrets may in some cases arise from a holy jealousy. The Christian, in whatever state he is, feels his own imperfection, and laments his conscious shortcomings; looking back, he observes with joy the work of grace in his soul, and does not, perhaps, so readily remember the then existing deficiencies of nature. Therefore he comes to think that the past was better than the present. He is afraid of backsliding, and therefore he jealously fears that he has; he is so anxious to live nearer to God, so dissatisfied with his present attainments, that he dares not believe that he advances, but fears that he has lost ground. I know this in my own experience, for when lying sick I have frequently lamented that pain has distracted my mind, and taken my attention off the Word of God; and I have longed for those seasons of health when I could read, meditate, and study with pleasure. But now that I have risen up from the sick bed, and am growing strong again, I frequently look back to the long nights and quiet days spent in my sick chamber, and think that it was better with me then than now—for now I am apt to be cumbered with much serving—and then I was shut in with God. many a man is really strong in Christ, but because he does not feel all the juvenile vivacity of his early days, he fears that ritual decrepitude has come upon him; he is now far more solid and steadfast, if not quite as quick and impulsive, but the good man, in his holy jealousy, marks most the excellencies of his juvenile piety, and forgets that there were grave deficiencies in it, while in his present state he notes the deficiencies, and fears to hope that he possesses *any* excellences! We are poor judges of our own condition, and usually err on one side or the other. All graces may not flourish at the same time, and faults in one direction may be more than balanced by advantages in another. We may be deeper in humility if we are not higher in delight; we may not glitter so much, and yet there may be more real gold in us; the leaf may not be so green, but the fruit may be more ripe; the way may be rougher, and yet be nearer heaven. Godly anxiety, then, may be the cause of many regrets which are, nevertheless, not warranted by any serious declension.

And, let me add that very often these regrets of ours about the past are not wise. It is impossible to draw a fair comparison between the various stages of Christian experience so as to give a judicious preference to one above another. Consider, as in a parable, the seasons of the year. There are many persons who in the midst of the beauties of spring, say, “Ah, but how fitful is the weather! These March winds and April showers come and go by such fits and starts, that nothing is to be depended upon; give me the safer glories of summer.” Yet, when they feel the heat of summer, and wipe the sweat from their brows, they say, “After all, with all the full-blow of beauty around us, we admire more the freshness, verdure, and vivacity of spring; the snowflake and the crocus coming forth as the advance guard of the army of flowers, have a superior charm about them.” Now it is idle to compare spring with summer! They differ and have each its beauties. We are in autumn now, and very likely, instead of prizing the peculiar treasures of autumn, some will despise the peaceful Sunday of the year, and mournfully compare yon fading leaves to funeral sermons replete with sadness! Some will contrast summer and autumn, and exalt one above another; now, whoever shall claim precedence for any season shall have me for an opponent! They are all beautiful in their season, and each excels after its kind; even thus it is wrong to compare the early zeal of the young Christian with the mature and mellow experience of the older believer and make preferences! Each is beautiful according to its time. You, dear young friend, with your intense zeal, are to be commended and imitated; but very much of your fire I am afraid arises from novelty, and you are not as strong as you are earnest; like a newborn river, you are swift in current, but neither deep nor broad. And you, my more advanced friend, who are much tried and buffeted—to you it is not easy to hold on your way under great inward struggles and severe depressions, but your deeper sense of weakness, your firmer grasp of the truths of God, your more intense fellowship with the Lord Jesus in His sufferings, your patience, and your steadfastness are all lovely in the eyes of the Lord your God. Be thankful, each of you, for what you have, for by the grace of God you are what you are!

After making all these deductions, however, I cannot conceive that they altogether account for the prevalence of these regrets. I am afraid the fact arises from the sad truth that many of us have actually deteriorated in grace, have decayed in spirit, and degenerated in heart. Alas, in many cases old

corruptions have fought desperately, and for a while caused a partial relapse; grace has become weak, and sin has seized the occasion for attack so that for a time the battle is turned, and Israel's banner is trailed in the mire! With many professors, I am afraid, prayer is neglected, worldliness is uppermost, sin has come to the front, nature leads the van, and grace and holiness are in the background; it should not be so, but I am afraid, ah, sadly afraid, it is.

IV. I will more fully speak upon this matter under the fourth head. Since these regrets are exceedingly common, it is to be feared that in some cases they are very sadly NECESSARY. Now, let the blast of the winnowing fan be felt through the congregation! Behold, the Lord Himself winnows this heap! Are there not many among us who once walked humbly with God, and near to Him, who have fallen into carnal security? Have we not taken it for granted that all is well with us, and are we not settled upon our lees like Moab of old? How little of heart-searching and self-examination are practiced nowadays! How little inquiry as to whether the root of the matter is really in us! Woe unto those who take their safety for granted, and sit down in God's house and say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we." Woe unto those who are at ease in Zion! Of all enemies, one of the most to be dreaded is *presumption*! To be secure in *Christ* is a blessing—to be secure in *ourselves* is a curse! Where carnal security reigns, the Spirit of God withdraws; He is with the humble and contrite, but He is not with the proud and self-sufficient. My brothers and sisters, are we all clear in this respect? Do not many of God's people also need to bemoan their worldliness? Once Christ was all with you, beloved—is it so now? Once you despised the world, and despised alike its pleasures and its frowns. But now, my beloved, are not the chains of worldly custom upon you? Are you not, many of you, enslaved by fashion, and eaten up with frivolity? Do you not, some of you, run as greedily as worldlings after the questionable enjoyments of this present life? Ought these things to be? Can they remain so, and your souls enjoy the Lord's smile? "You cannot serve God and mammon." "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You cannot be Christ's disciples, and be in fellowship with the ungodly. Come out from among them! Be you separate! Touch not the unclean thing! Then shall you know right joyfully that the Lord is a Father to you, and that you are His sons and daughters. But, brothers and sisters have you gone to Jesus outside the camp, and do you abide there with Him? Is the line of your separation visible—does it exist? Is there any separation at all? Is it not often the case that the professed people of God are mixed up with the sons of men so that you cannot discern the one from the other? If it is so with any of us, let him humble himself, and let him cry in bitterness, "Oh that I were as in months past."

Brothers and sisters, feel the breath of the winnowing fan again! How is it with you as to private prayer? Are there not believers, and we *hope* true believers, too, who are lax in devotion? The morning prayer is brief, but alas, it is not fervent; the evening prayer is too often sleepy; cries to the Lord are few and far between; communion with heaven is distant, suspended, almost non-existent in many cases! Look into this, my brothers and sisters; let each man and woman commune with their own heart and be still; think not of others just now, but let each one consider *their* ways. How is it with your love to the souls of sinners? There was a time when you would have done anything to bring someone to Christ—when any exertion you could have put forth would have been made spontaneously, without the need of incessant exhortations. Are you as ready to speak for Jesus now as you once were? Do you watch to bring souls to Him? Does the tear tremble in your eye, now, as it once did for lost souls perishing without Christ? Alas, upon how many has a hardening influence operated; ah, and this is true even of us ministers! We have grown professional in our service, and now we preach like automatons, wound up for a sermon to run down when the discourse is over; we have little more care for the souls of men than if they were so much dirt! Trifles of criticism, fancies of speculation, or fopperies of oratory fascinate too many who only want to win *smiles*! God forgive us if we have fallen into so deplorable a state!

Ah, and how many of God's people must confess that their conscience is not as tender, now, as it used to be? The time was when if you said half a word amiss, you would hide away to weep over it; when, in business, if there had been a little mistake, and anything that might be construed as a lack of integrity, you would have felt ashamed for a week that such a thing had happened! But now, ah, professors hear this—some of you can be dishonest, and speak words that border on lasciviousness, and be as others are, yet your heart does not smite you—instead you come to the communion table, and feel

you have a right to be there! You listen to the Word of God, and take comfort from it, when you should be ashamed and confounded!

Let me enquire whether there are not many of us whose zeal is almost gone? We once loved the Savior intensely, and His cause we eagerly sought to serve; but now we take matters easily, and do not travail in birth for souls. Some rich men were likely to give most freely to the cause of God, but now covetousness has palsied the hand of generosity; even poor Christians are not always as ready with their two mites as they were in better days! You were likely to labor, too, but that Sunday school class sees you no longer; no street preaching now; no tract distributing now; all forms of Christ's service you have renounced; you fancy you have done enough. Alas, poor sluggard! Has the sun shone long enough? Has God given you your daily bread long enough? Oh, cease not working, brothers and sisters, till God ceases to be merciful to you! "On, on, on!" "Forward, forward, forward," is the very motto of the Christian life! Let none of us talk of finality, for we have not yet attained; till life is over, our zeal should still glow, and our labors for Christ should multiply.

Are there but other signs of declension that some of us might, with but very slight examination, discover in ourselves? Is not brotherly love in many Christians very questionable? Have they not forgotten altogether, the family ties which bind all Christians to one another? And with brotherly love has not love to the gospel gone, too, so that now, with many, one doctrine is almost as good as another? If a man can talk well, and is an orator, they enjoy his ministry whether he advocates truth or error! Once they could go to the little meeting house where Christianity was preached faithfully, though in an uncouth style; but now they must have the help of organs, or they cannot praise God; and there must be millinery, and genuflections, or else they cannot pray to Him; and they must listen to oratory and elocution or else they cannot accept God's Word! He is sickly who cannot dine without made dishes and spiced meats, but he is a healthy man of God who can eat heaven's bread, and heaven's meat even when it is not served on a lordly dish! Might not many of us blush if we were to think how low our graces are; how weak our faith; how few our good works, and our gracious words with which we should bear testimony to His name? Yes, in thousands of cases Christians need not be stopped if they were to commence this mournful cry, "Oh that I were as in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle."

V. But I must pass on to observe that these regrets, **BY THEMSELVES, ARE USELESS!** It is unprofitable to read these words of Job, and say, "Just so, that is how I feel," and then continue in the same way. If a man has neglected his business, and so has lost his trade, it may mark a turn in his affairs when he says, "I wish I had been more industrious." But if he abides in the same sloth as before, of what use is his regret? If he shall fold his arms and say, "Oh that I had dug that plot of land! Oh that I had sown that field"—no harvest will come because of his lamentations! Up, man, up, and labor, or you will have the sluggard's reward—rags and poverty will still be your portion! If a man is in declining health; if drunkenness and riot have broken down his constitution, it may mark a salutary reform in his history if he confesses his former folly; but if his regrets end in mere *expressions*, will these heal him? I think not! So neither will a man affected by spiritual decline be restored by the mere fact of his knowing himself to be so! Let him go to the beloved Physician, drink of the waters of life again, and receive the leaves of the tree which are for the healing of the nations! Inactive regrets are insincere; if a man really did lament that he had lost communion with God, he would seek to regain it; if he does not seek to be restored, he is adding to all his former sins that of lying before God in uttering regrets that he does not feel in his soul.

I have known some, I fear, who even satisfied themselves with expressions of regrets. "Ah," they say, "I am a deeply experienced man; I can go where Job went; I can mourn and lament as Job did." Remember, many have been on Job's dunghill who knew nothing of Job's God; many have imitated David in his sins who never followed him in his repentance! They have gone from their sin into hell by the way of presumption, whereas David went from it to heaven by the road of repentance and forgiveness! Never let us merely, because we feel some uneasiness within, conclude that this suffices. If in the dead of the night you should hear thieves in your house, you would not congratulate yourself because you were awake to hear them; you would waive all such comfortable reflections till the rogues were driven out, and your property was safe! And so, when you know things are amiss with you, do not say, "I am satisfied because I know it is so." Up, and with all the strength that God's Holy Spirit can

give you, strive to drive out these traitors from your bosom—for they are robbing your soul of her best treasures!

VI. Brothers and sisters, these regrets, when they are necessary, are very HUMBLING. Meditate now for a minute. Think, beloved, what was your position in your happiest times, in those days that are now past? Had you any love to spare, then? You were zealous; were you too zealous? You were gracious; were you too gracious? No, in our best estate we were very far short of what we ought to be, and yet we have gone back from even that! It was a poor attainment at the best; have we fallen even from that? During the time we have been going back, we ought to have gone forward! What enjoyments we have lost by our wanderings! What progress we have missed! As John Bunyan well puts it, when Christian fell asleep and lost his roll, he had to go back for it, and he found it very hard going back, and moreover, he had to go on again so that he had to traverse three times the road he needed only to have traveled once! And then he came in late at the gates of the palace beautiful, and was afraid of the lions, of which he would have had no fear had not the darkness set in. We know not what we lose, when we lose growth in grace.

Alas, how much the church has lost through us, for if the Christian becomes poor in grace, he lessens the church's wealth of grace; we have a common treasury as a church, and everyone who takes away his portion from it, robs the whole! Dear brothers and sisters, how accountable are many of us for the low tone of religion in the world, especially those of us who occupy the foremost ranks! If grace is at a low ebb with us, others say, "Well, look at so-and-so; I am as good as he." So much in the church do we take the cue from one another that each one of us is in a measure responsible for the low state of the whole! Some of us are very quick to see the faults of others; may it not be that these faults are our own children? Those who have little love to others generally discover that there is little love in the church, and I notice that those who complain of the inconsistencies of others are usually the most inconsistent persons themselves! Shall I be a robber of my fellow Christians? Shall I be an injury to the cause of Christ? Shall I be a comfort to sinners in their sin? Shall I rob Christ of His glory; I, who was saved from such depths of sin; I, who have been favored with such enjoyments of His presence; I, who have been on Tabor's top with Him, and seen Him transfigured; I, who have been in His banqueting house, and have drunk out of the flagons of His love; shall I be so devoid of grace that I shall even injure His children, and make His enemies to blaspheme? Wretch that I am to do this! Smite your breast, my brothers and sisters, if such has been your sin! Go home and smite your breast again, and ask *God* to smite it, till, with a broken heart, you cry repentantly for restoration! And then again go forth as a burning and a shining light to serve your Master better than before!

VII. These regrets, then, are humbling, and they may be made very PROFITABLE in many other ways. First, they show us what human nature is. Have we gone back so far? O, brothers and sisters, we might have gone back to *hell*! We would have done so if it had not been for the grace of God. What a marvel it is that God has borne with our ill manners, when He might justly have laid the reins on our necks, and allowed us to rush on in the road which we so often hankered after! See you not, beloved, what a body of death we carry with us, and what a terrible power it possesses? When you see the mischief that corruption has already done, never trust yourself, but look for new grace every day.

Learn again to prize what spiritual blessings yet remain; if you have such bitter regrets for what you have lost, hold fast what is still yours; slip back no further, for if these slips have cost you so much, take heed that they do not ruin you! To continue presumptuous may be a proof that our profession is rotten throughout; only a holy jealousy can remove the suspicion of insincerity. Let your previous failings teach you to walk cautiously in the future. Be jealous, for you serve a jealous God. Since gray hairs may come upon you, here and there, and you may not know it, search, watch, try yourself day by day lest you relapse yet more! This should teach us to live by faith, since our best attainments fail us. We rejoice today, but we may mourn tomorrow. What a mercy it is that our salvation does not depend on what we are or what we feel! Christ has finished our salvation—no man can destroy what He has completed; our life is hid with Christ in God, and is safe there! None can pluck us out of Jehovah's hands. Since we so frequently run aground, it is clear that we would be wrecked altogether if we went to sea in a legal vessel with self for our pilot. Let us keep to the good ship of free grace, steered by immutable faithfulness—for none other can bring us to the desired haven. But oh, let that free grace fill us with

ardent gratitude! Since Christ has kept us, though we could not keep ourselves, let us bless His name, and overwhelmed with obligations, let us rise with a solemn determination that we will serve Him better than we have ever done before! And may His blessed Spirit help us to make the determination a fact.

VIII. So, to close. These regrets OUGHT NOT TO BE CONTINUAL. They ought to be removed—decidedly removed by an earnest effort, made in God's strength, to get back to the position which we occupied before, and to attain something still better.

Dear brothers and sisters, if any of you desire now to come into the higher life, and to feel anew your first love, what shall I say to you? Go back to where you started! Do not stay discussing whether you are a Christian or not; go to Christ as a poor guilty sinner. When the door to heaven seems shut to me as a saint, I will get through it as a *sinner*, trusting in the precious blood of Jesus! Come and stand again, as though all your sins were still on you, at the foot of the cross where still may be seen the dropping blood of the infinitely precious atonement. My Savior, I trust You again—guilty, more guilty than I was before; a sinful child of God, I trust You; “wash me thoroughly from my iniquities, and purge me from my sin.” You will never have your graces revived unless you go to the cross! Begin life again! The best air for a man to breathe when he is sickly is said to be that of his birthplace—it was at Calvary we were born-again! It is only at Calvary we can be restored when we are declining! As a sinner, return to the Savior, and ask to be restored; then, as a further means of health, search out the cause of your declension. Probably it was a *neglect of private prayer*! Where the disease began, there must the remedy be applied; pray more earnestly, more frequently, more importunately. Or was it a neglect of hearing the word? Were you enticed by novelty or cleverness away from a really searching and instructive ministry? Go back and feed on wholesome food again—perhaps that may cure the disease!

Or have you been too grasping after the world? Brother, you loved God when you had but one shop! You now have two, and are giving all your time and thoughts to *business*—and your soul is getting lean! Strike off some of that business, for it is a bad business that makes your soul poor! I would not check industry or enterprise for a single moment; let a man do all he can, but not at the expense of his soul! Push, but do not push down your soul! You may buy gold too dear, and may attain a high position in this world at a cost which you may have to rue all your days. Where the mischief began, *there* apply the remedy, and oh, I urge you, and most of all upon myself; do not make excuses for yourselves! Do not mitigate your faults; do not say it *must* be so; do not compare yourselves among yourselves, or you will be unwise. But to the perfect image of Christ let your hearts aspire; to the ardor of your divine Redeemer who loved not Himself, but loved you; to the intense fervor of His apostles who laid themselves upon the altar of God for His sake; for Christ's sake, and for yours, aspire to this, and may we as a church live near to God and grow in grace! Then shall the Lord add to us daily of such as shall be saved.

There are some here who will say, “I do not understand this sermon—I have no cause to look back with regret; I have always been much the same as I am; I know nothing of religion.” The day shall come when you will envy the least and most trembling believer; to you careless, Christless sinners, the day shall come when you will cry to the rocks for God's mercy, and beg them to conceal you from the eyes of Him whom now you dare despise! I beseech you be not high-minded, lift not up your horn on high, speak not so exceedingly proud! Bow before the Christ of God, and ask Him to give you the new life, for even if that new life has declined and become sickly, it is better than the death in which you dwell. Go and seek grace of Him who alone can give it, and He will grant it to you this day, for His infinite mercy's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—REVELATION 2; 3:1-6.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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